

# SECTION: SHELTER

## TOPIC TITLE: Housing/Housing First Rapid Re-Housing



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### Importance of Topic:

Domestic and sexual violence is a leading cause of homelessness for women and children, and the need for safe and affordable housing is one of the most pressing concerns for survivors of violence and abuse ([Quote source](#)). When a survivor of domestic violence chooses to leave their abusive partner, access to safe and affordable housing is one of the most significant barriers they will have to overcome. Financial assistance, housing programs and cooperative landlords give survivors the support they need to be independent. Legal and financial burdens to independent housing vary across the Commonwealth and vary from one survivor to the next. Domestic Violence Programs will work with survivors to overcome obstacles to safe and affordable housing through community partnerships and ongoing advocacy.

### Statutes/Professional Standards:

- Code of Virginia Reference:
    - [§ 16.1-253.4.: Emergency protective orders authorized in certain cases; penalty.](#)
    - [§ 16.1-253.1.: Preliminary protective orders in cases of family abuse; confidentiality.](#)
    - [§ 16.1-279.1. Protective order in cases of family abuse.](#) Includes provisions that grant the petitioner possession of the premises occupied by the parties to the exclusion of the respondent (EPO, PPO, PO); that prevent the
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respondent from terminating utility services or requiring the restoration of utility services to the premises granted to the petitioner (PPO, PO); and that require the respondent to provide suitable alternative housing for the petitioner (PPO, PO).

- [§ 55.1-1236. Early termination of rental agreements by victims of family abuse, sexual abuse, or criminal sexual assault](#). Allows for early termination of lease agreement within certain parameters.
- [§ 55.1-1245. \(Effective the later of July 1, 2028, or 7 years after the COVID-19 pandemic state of emergency expires\) Noncompliance with rental agreement; monetary penalty](#) (Section D): A lease cannot be terminated solely due to an act of family abuse against the tenant as long as certain stipulations are met.
- [Professional Standards Reference](#): Level II Training Topic: Fair Housing and Domestic Violence.
- Federal Law: HEARTH Act (Public Law 111-22, title IV of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11371 et seq.)) Includes guidance related to homeless services for survivors and domestic violence agencies.

## **Terms Used or Needed to Understand this Topic:**

*Housing First*: A homeless assistance approach that prioritizes providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness, thus ending their homelessness and serving as a platform from which they can pursue personal goals and improve their quality of life. This approach is guided by the belief that people need basic necessities like food and a place to live before attending to anything less critical, such as getting a job, budgeting properly, or attending to substance use issues. Additionally, Housing First is based on the theory that client choice is valuable in housing selection and supportive service participation, and that

exercising that choice is likely to make a client more successful in remaining housed and improving their life ([Source](#)).

*Rapid Re-Housing:* A solution to homelessness designed to help individuals and families to quickly exit homelessness and return to permanent housing. It is offered without preconditions (such as employment, income, absence of criminal record, or sobriety) and the resources and services provided are typically tailored to the unique needs of the household. There are three core components to rapid re-housing. While a program must make all three available, it is not required that a single entity provide all three services or that a household utilize them all. The components are: housing identification, rent and move-in assistance, and case management ([Source](#)).

*Permanent Supportive Housing:* An intervention that combines affordable housing assistance with voluntary support services to address the needs of chronically homeless people. The services are designed to build independent living and tenancy skills and connect people with community-based health care, treatment and employment services ([Source](#)).

*Transitional Housing:* Typically involves a temporary residence of up to 24 months with wrap-around services to help people stabilize their lives ([Source](#)).

## **Did You Know?**

Housing programs can provide critical services for survivors and are often a key component in helping survivors find safety and stability. Housing is a basic need and through an accessible housing program advocates can support a survivor's sense of self-empowerment in accomplishing their goals.

## **Racial/Social Justice Focus:**

Barriers to access safe and affordable housing are often exacerbated for people of color, immigrants, LGBTQ+ youth, and survivors with disabilities. Systemic factors such as institutional racism, ableism, and discrimination can create further challenges for many survivors in accessing housing options that best fit their needs. Additionally, providing

housing services to survivors regardless of their criminal records, mental health or use of substances is a key aspect of accessibility.

*Scenario 1:* Shane has recently fled an abusive relationship from his partner and has relocated to another city for safety. When applying for apartments, he has often been turned away due to a past eviction and low credit score, both of which were due to his partner's complete control over their shared bank account. It has taken Shane quite some time to fully understand the depth of his financial circumstances, since he was 'kept in the dark' for so long. He recently got a job at a local restaurant and is sleeping on a friend's couch, though he is getting increasingly anxious about where to go next - he recognizes that he may need to return to his abuser if he can't get on his feet. Shane reached out to the local domestic violence agency to inquire about resources and options. After assessing his safety, the advocate connected Shane with the Rapid Re-housing Coordinator to begin steps to connect him to housing options. The RRHC inquires if there are any additional resources that may be helpful for his ability to maintain housing and what kind of lease (short term vs. long term) would work best for his needs. Shane shares he would like some mental health resources and showed some interest in the financial literacy class brochure that he saw on the RRHC's desk. Shane and the RRHC agree to pursue some short term lease options, with the ability to lengthen based on his ability to pay rent for the next three months.

- Why is it important for the advocate to assess the additional needs of the survivor during a housing meeting? How may these needs impact their ability to maintain housing?
- Transitioning to an independent living situation after experiencing DV (and specifically financial abuse) can feel daunting and overwhelming. How can housing advocates support this process so that the survivor feels empowered to move forward?

*Scenario 2:* Janet is a mother of four who is considering fleeing a DV situation. When she calls the DV hotline, the advocate supports her in safety planning and discusses exit

options. Based on Janet's risk assessment, she scored very high and shared with the advocate that she is increasingly concerned for her and her children's safety. When the advocate offers to engage in a shelter screening with her, Janet expresses hesitation. She recognizes that she is in an unsafe environment, but does not want to leave her home, which she co-owns with her abuser.

- How can the advocate support Janet's needs during this hotline call?
- Recognizing that not all survivors may want to flee their home, how can agencies collaborate with community entities (courts, legal aid services, etc.) to support Janet to stay in her home?
- Are there creative funding strategies and opportunities that can provide Janet some initial support so she can continue staying in her home safely and independently?

### **Trauma-informed Focus:**

Incorporating voice and choice in the application process can be a helpful way to support a survivor-led conversation in deciding what kind of housing arrangement would be best for them (apartment, house, urban vs. rural environment, etc.). Strong agency relationships with flexible landlords can increase options for a client who may have previously struggled in finding or keeping safe and stable housing due to bad credit, eviction history, or history of criminal charges.

### **Promising Practices:**

#### *Overview of General Characteristics:*

- Provide flexible housing accommodation options so survivors can make decisions towards independence, safety, and empowerment.

- Foster harmonious working relationships with community housing networks, furniture banks, and neighboring organizations that may utilize shared resources. Additionally, relationships with workplaces and transportation agencies can be essential for improving accessibility in housing options.
- Strengthen landlord relationships by providing trauma-informed, domestic violence educational opportunities.
- Being open minded in assessing current housing eligibility tools and determining if they are best serving clients' unique needs or could be changed for another tool (ex.using a scoring sheet vs. decision making tree).
- Consider funding options for survivors who need to flee for safety reasons but want to stay in the same house.

*Examples:*

- **YWCA of Richmond**, in addition to an emergency shelter, has a Housing Program that provides Rapid Re-Housing for survivors in the City of Richmond and Chesterfield County, who are fleeing IPV and who are homeless. This program is a voluntary service, with a process to assess if Rapid Re-Housing is the best fit for each client. This program requires its participants to obtain a lease on their own, although YWCA of Richmond is happy to support additional needs of case management. This can involve identifying barriers such as childcare needs and what is needed to help survivors stay in housing successfully and independently. If survivors are in need of furniture, YWCA of Richmond works with a local furniture bank and a local family services organization to obtain housewares needed to move into a situation with lessened stress. Their Rapid Rehousing program is a vital part of supporting survivors, especially those who have experienced financial abuse and do not have the resources needed to move forward. Having this resource has been critical for survivors to make a decision towards independence, safety, and empowerment. The Housing Specialist supports survivors in accessing landlords

who are flexible in renting to those with eviction histories and provide additional support for obtaining a lease, such as sending a letter advocating on behalf of them, making phone calls to connect with community landlords, etc. YWCA of Richmond also connects with the RVA Housing Warriors group, which is a vast housing resource in the community, to help with networking and resource needs. Some challenges have included finding private landlords who are willing to rent to individuals with eviction histories, as well as clients need for additional mental health support - as they are not always ready or stabilized to transition to independent housing.

*Program Focus:*

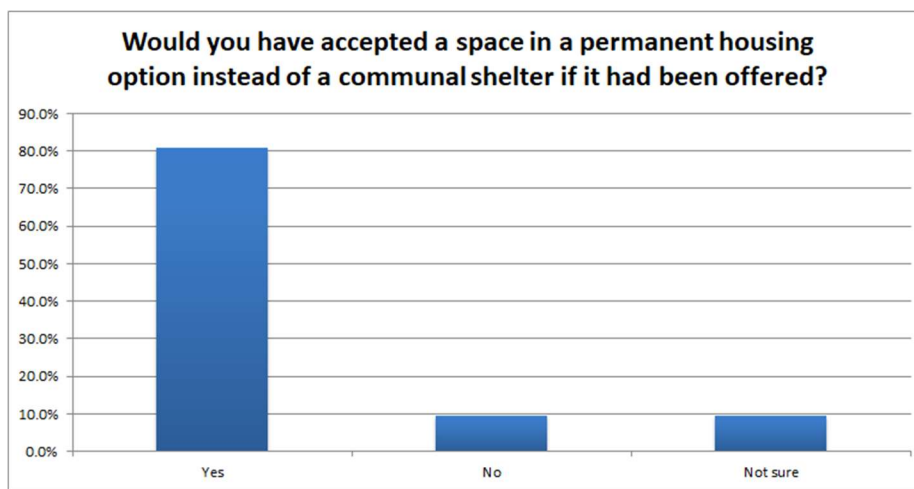
- How can your organization be creative in the work with survivors with bad credit, eviction histories, or criminal charges?
- Does your housing program offer and provide educational support for landlords to better understand how to work with domestic violence survivors?
- What additional resources could a survivor need in order to stay in housing successfully and independently? How can staff support these needs?
- What can your agency do to motivate private landlords to increase their capacity to work with survivors? Can funding be used as an incentive?
- What could be housing issues for elderly survivors and how can organizations be creative in supporting this population?

*Survivor voice:*

Documenting Our Work Evidence

- "there's just not enough housing for low income housing"
- "My main concern was finding housing in time before I had to leave but staff helped me out"

- “I am desperately needing a resource to help me with housing because I don't have any money for a place or room to rent. I don't want to be forced to go back to my abuser.”



Data from Survivor Voice Survey, 2021

### COVID-19 Focus:

Availability of safe housing can be limited during COVID-19. Landlords and apartment complexes which may have housed survivors before may not be willing to house them now due to risks of infection. Advocates should be aware that individuals are going through a variety of unique barriers and challenges related to housing and should attempt to work with survivors on a case by case basis to ensure their access to stable housing.

#### *During COVID-19:*

- How will your organization work with survivors who are at risk of eviction due to pandemic-related loss of income?
- What unique ways does your organization have to house individuals if the agencies you normally work with aren't taking new residents?
- If your organization runs a transitional housing program, how will you ensure health and safety precautions are taken between each resident who stays in these housing options?



- How will your organization operate its housing programs virtually if office spaces are closed or limited to the public?

*COVID-19 Examples:*

- Since COVID-19, **YWCA of Richmond** has interestingly seen a decline in survivors seeking housing, though they recognize many have diverted to alternative options such as finding relatives to stay with, transitioning out of state, and/or staying in DV situations longer. YWCA of Richmond has an employment navigator on staff to support the financial uncertainty related to COVID-related unemployment rates. Staff has offered increasing support to help survivors stay where they are, such as identifying additional financial resources and participating in eviction diversion programs. Staff provide advocacy services remotely through phone and virtual capacity, such as a video chat app called Duo, for the safety of clients and staff. They still strive to be as accessible and available to clients as possible.

**Additional Resources + Links:**

*Publications:*

- [Safe Housing Partnerships](#): a collection of resources, data, and access to technical assistance provided by the federal Domestic Violence and Housing Technical Assistance Consortium focusing on ending homelessness for survivors of domestic and sexual violence and their families.
  - [Determining Housing Needs for DV/SV Survivors: A Decision Tree as an Alternative to a Score Sheet](#): Webinar and accompanying [PDF sheet](#).
- [Transitional Housing Toolkit](#): a collection of resources, templates, and other tools collected by the National Network to End Domestic Violence.
- [Housing Advocacy](#) from Resource Sharing Project: Resources, papers, and webinars.

- [Hearth Act Regulations and Domestic Violence](#): A 9-page summary document from the National Network to End Domestic Violence.

*Training:*

- [Using VOCA Funds to Help DV Survivors Obtain Safe and Stable Housing](#) (August 2018).